



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Michael Negard
Telephone: (334) 255-3770
michael.j.negard.civ@mail.mil
<https://safety.army.mil/>

National Safety Month: Expecting the unexpected

JULIE SHELLEY
Communication and Public Affairs
U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center

If there is anything 2020 and COVID-19 have shown Americans thus far, preparing for anything and everything is at the top of the list.

And it's not just extra toilet paper households should have on hand.

"Emergency planning agencies have told us for years to be ready for any number of situations," said Command Sgt. Maj. William L. Gardner, U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center. "Coronavirus really drove home the fact that emergencies come in all different forms and readiness is key."

While the current pandemic might seem all-consuming, Soldiers, families and civilian employees should still be primed for severe weather hazards, especially since many of the Army's installations are located in areas prone to natural disaster and hurricane season is here.

"Installations like Fort Stewart, Fort Benning, Fort Gordon, Fort Jackson and Fort Rucker along the South Atlantic-Gulf Coast states prepare for hurricanes, tornadoes and flooding, among other events," said Randall T. McPherson, installation emergency manager for Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia. "Out in the Midwest, Fort Still, Fort Leonard Wood, Fort Riley and Fort Carson prepare for tornadoes, wildfires and snow or ice storms along with usual winter weather."

Time is critical in severe weather, which is why all homes and businesses should have a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association weather radio in their emergency kits.

"You have to be in a position to hear watches and warnings," said James Spann, chief meteorologist for WBMA-TV in Birmingham, Alabama. "Beyond that, everyone needs to have wireless emergency alerts enabled on their phones and a good weather app designed to push warnings based on location."

"Never, ever rely on an outdoor siren."

Thinking there is time to prepare in the days before an imminent weather event is a common pitfall in individual emergency planning. In reality, lead time for severe storms ranges from a few minutes to a few days, and competition for critical supplies peaks during this time.

According to Spann, accurate forecasting for hurricane landfall generally gives 2-4 days' warning; winter storms, 1-2 days; river flooding, 2-7 days; and flash floods and tornadoes, just 1-2 hours and 10-15 minutes, respectively.

With many Army posts falling within the two areas of maximum tornado occurrence in the United States — “Traditional” Tornado Alley across the Great Plains and “Dixie Alley” in the South, Spann urged Soldiers, families and civilian employees to follow established storm protocols to save lives.

“You need to be on the lowest floor of your home or location on post, away from windows, in a small room near the center of the structure,” he said. “You don’t have to be underground. Those who live in manufactured housing or mobile homes must get out and go to a site-built shelter or structure.”

Data from tornado outbreaks in recent years also points to having the right safety equipment readily accessible in the event of a tornado warning.

“Everyone needs to wear a helmet since most serious injuries and deaths in tornadoes are due to blunt force trauma to the skull region,” Spann said. “We also recommend a portable air horn for everyone sheltered in case they are injured and can’t vocalize a need for help and hard-soled shoes for potentially walking over debris fields.”

Located near the Georgia coast, Fort Stewart and HAAF are very familiar with severe weather response. Since just 2015, the post has experienced an EF-1 tornado, one tropical storm and three hurricanes.

These events required immense logistical planning, from personnel and family evacuation to aircraft relocation to storm recovery, McPherson said. Close coordination with state and local officials was essential in these events and remains a vital part of Fort Stewart’s emergency plan.

“Community is an intimate link in our planning,” he explained. “More than 70 percent of our military and civilian employee populations live in surrounding areas and are required to abide by instructions of the governor and local government officials during severe weather. Their support is just as important when the storm has passed.”

Much like risk management, emergency planning is a continual process and, in absence of a crystal ball, having a comprehensive response in place before disaster strikes is crucial in responding to unforeseen crises.

“No matter how well we plan, we don’t know what we don’t know until the real-world event is upon us,” McPherson said. “We implement mitigation measures, capture those actions in writing and come back afterwards to begin the process all over again.”

For more information on emergency preparedness and building an emergency kit, visit <https://www.ready.gov> or the USACRC website at <https://safety.army.mil>.

Note: The USACRC will release one themed article and other media per week throughout the month of June in support of National Safety Month. Be sure to check the website regularly for updates.